

The Reconciled Church: 7 Bridges to Peace

Until criminal justice reform is introduced in America, situations like those in Ferguson, Missouri; Staten Island, New York; North Charleston, South Carolina; and now Baltimore, Maryland, will continue to arise and severely dampen if not destroy the racial unification efforts of the church and society, prominent voices at The Reconciled Church Summit said Wednesday in Orlando, Florida.

And it is the church—God’s people—as the numerous speakers agreed, that must spearhead the movement and lead the way in racial reconciliation societal reform and changes in the current criminal justice system.

Given the recent deaths of African-Americans like Michael Brown in Ferguson, Eric Garner in Staten Island and Freddie Gray in Baltimore, the atmosphere has reached a critical, if not potential powder keg stage in America.

“I compare it to a plane that is about ready to go down in flames,” said Bishop T.D. Jakes, senior pastor of The Potter’s House in Dallas, Texas and one of the founding members of The Reconciled Church. “If we don’t pull up now, and fast, we’re going to crash and burn.”

Violent protests in Ferguson and most recently in Baltimore have become symbolic of the racial divide in America and clear, unabashed examples of the need for criminal justice reform.

It is only through a unified church and adherence to Jesus’ prayer in John 17, TRC co-founder James Robison said, that will heal the racial divide in this country and prompt justice system officials to bring about much-needed change in the way they handle certain volatile situations.

“The question of the hour is whether the church will meet Jesus’ prayer to the Father,” said Robison, an evangelist and teacher and founder of Life Outreach International. “Father God is looking at us, his family, right now. He’s saying, ‘look at my kids.’ He wants to see a family that loves its father so much that they will love each other.

“The greatest source of influence over this nation should be the church, not some political party. We’ve tried to make another pharaoh our source. We’ve been kept in bondage by a system we have erroneously put our trust in. We need to get an answer to Jesus’ prayer, and immediately.”

In praying for future believers, Jesus relayed this in John 17:20-23, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave me I have given them, that they may be one just as we are one; I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have Sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

Given the ongoing state of obvious racial mistrust in America, the unification of the church—a must to help bring about criminal justice reform—certainly won’t be easy, TRC co-founder Bishop Harry Jackson said. But Jackson says unification has to be about more than simple change.

“Lasting change requires transformation,” Jackson said. “It’s not just about ‘getting along,’ it’s about getting it right. Only great diversity, in unison, can bring America to its better self.”

And to bring about that society-changing transformation, The Reconciled Church is imploring local churches to employ its “Seven Bridges to Peace” initiatives immediately.

TRC's Seven Bridges to Peace are, as described on :

1. Prayer and reconciliation events: Prayer will be perpetually offered to God requesting wisdom and divine aid for the multi-generational fulfillment of the Great Commandment (John 17:1-26; love and unity) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 18-20). We will have periodic gatherings of Christian interdenominational and multi-ethnic believers to lift up specific prayer points. This will be accompanied by periodic voluntary engagement in transparent, honest, frank, civil and Godly dialogue; the implementation of plans of action to confront, overcome and resolve destructive views, values, convictions, preferences and practices (like racism, sexism, age-ism, etc.) that divide the Lord's church, misrepresent Jesus Christ, defame God's creation and hinder the fulfillment of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

2. Education reform: Increase access to early educational programs prior to kindergarten for children. Churches can play a major role in offering academic and character building enrichment programs to students in middle and high school. Focus will be on developing core skills in language, reading, and mathematics as well college preparedness.

3. Civic engagement: The meetings would emphasize and educate on the following elements: Christian Citizenship Training Best practices for dealing with citizen and law enforcement rights and issues that threaten to denigrate, deteriorate, debilitate or devastate the highest quality of life for urban residents.

4. Community outreach and service: Compassionate Outreaches with Christian faith-based interdenominational and multi-ethnic Christian based social services . These are strategic efforts to serve the under-resourced, poverty stricken residents living in economically devastated and financially depressed zones of our urban community. In Greater St. Louis and other parts of the urban world; models include counsel and

representation for legal issues, financial assistance, housing education, healthcare programs, employment training, etc.

5. Marriage and family: Programs and services that will help to introduce, rebuild, restore and/or enhance the divine sanctity of life, the discovery of personal and relational identity, purpose and destiny. Navigation into the discovery and the fulfillment of these through seminars, personal and group counseling, youth athletic programs, pro-life services and biblical marriage and family training and development. Mentoring and fatherhood initiatives will be a key component of family development.

6. Criminal justice reform: Minority engagement with the criminal justice system is at the core of our current tensions. We need strategic involvement with the criminal justice system. This would include training for prison and jail evangelism workers, and regional partnerships for prison aftercare and job creation.

7. Economic development: In addition to personal financial training, credit repair, and benevolence; many other dimensions of economic equipping can be launched from churches. Investment training, schools of business, and specific entrepreneurial training plans can be developed. There are several different models from St. Louis and beyond that will help position the church to encourage “ethical capitalism.”

But can the church actually affect economic development and criminal justice? Undoubtedly, Jackson says.

“As it models unity—as God’s people address the racial divide in our own house—yes, new things can happen,” Jackson said. “For one, we all see more clearly that we have not just a race problem, but a class problem, a poverty problem. The TRC becomes a clearinghouse of ideas and power through unity. Church, government, business ... together we stand—together we

revitalize education, economic development and justice—or divided we fall.”

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